

**The rise and fall of ‘the original Bright Young Thing’:  
Beverley Nichols, Crazy Pavements (1927) and popular  
authorship**

BROWN, Erica

Available from Sheffield Hallam University Research Archive (SHURA) at:

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/8229/>

---

This document is the author deposited version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

**Published version**

BROWN, Erica (2015). The rise and fall of ‘the original Bright Young Thing’: Beverley Nichols, Crazy Pavements (1927) and popular authorship. *The Review of English Studies*, 66 (273), 144-163.

---

**Copyright and re-use policy**

See <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/information.html>

**The Rise and Fall of ‘the original Bright Young Thing’: Beverley Nichols, *Crazy Pavements* (1927) and Popular Authorship**

Abstract:

This essay re-examines the work and reputation of ‘the original Bright Young Thing’, Beverley Nichols (1898-1983). Nichols was a key cultural figure and best-selling novelist in the 1920s, yet now exists only as an occasional footnote in academic criticism. Nichols’ novel *Crazy Pavements* (1927) influenced Evelyn Waugh’s 1930 novel *Vile Bodies*, but was not part of the lauded avant-garde in the 1920s, and is instead a case-study in the modes of writing and publishing that condemned a work to the derogatory category ‘middlebrow’. Nichols’ accessible narrative style drew particularly on contemporary popular journalism, which was regarded by influential critics such as Q. D. Leavis as contributing to a breakdown in standards of style. The changing critical landscape of the twentieth century that valued modernist experimentation above other, more accessible forms of writing also increasingly denigrated the professional writer. This essay argues that Nichols effectively destroyed his own critical reputation through becoming someone who could and would write almost anything for money.

A very charming person, with a brilliant pen, a great feeling for life below the surface of things, a great sense of fun, and a sensitive sense of beauty.

Ethel Mannin, 1930<sup>1</sup>

A mercenary, hypochondriacal, flibbertigibbet who doesn’t take in one of six words addressed to him – but civil to the old ladies.

Evelyn Waugh, 1944<sup>2</sup>

Beverley Nichols (1898-1983), journalist, novelist, composer and playwright, was one of the key cultural figures of the 1920s. In later years Osbert Sitwell called Nichols ‘the original bright young thing’,<sup>3</sup> but unlike those such as Elizabeth Ponsonby or Zita Jungman who found fame simply for going to parties, he was an acclaimed and best-selling writer.<sup>4</sup> As Nichols wrote in his 1949 memoirs, ‘though Noel Coward, Evelyn Waugh and I were all supposed by the general public to be leading spirits of the Bright Young People, nothing could have been further from the truth; we all had far too much work to do’.<sup>5</sup> Along with large quantities of journalism and an autobiography, *Twenty-Five* (1926), which would be reprinted as one of the first ten Penguins in 1935, Nichols published four novels in the 1920s, and with each achieved increased critical and popular success. His first novel *Prelude* (1920), written immediately after leaving Marlborough school, was described by *The Times Literary Supplement* as ‘one which old and present members of the public schools will read with pleasure’;<sup>6</sup> his second, *Patchwork* (1921) as ‘a novel which at once takes a distinguished place in the gallery of University fiction’;<sup>7</sup> the third novel *Self* (1922) was greeted as ‘the fulfilment of earlier promise [...] which definitely places Mr Nichols among the little band of men and women who must be read’ and became a best-seller.<sup>8</sup> His fourth novel, *Crazy Pavements* (1927), a story of ‘nymphomaniacs, homosexualists, sadists, and drug addicts’ was another best-seller and impressed the critics.<sup>9</sup> *The Saturday Review of Literature* noted, ‘throughout, there are qualities so maturely blended that we remember only with difficulty the novelist’s youth. “Crazy Pavements” combines technical dexterity and substantial matter with smart gaiety; it is an extremely encouraging book’.<sup>10</sup> The *Bookman* exclaimed ‘Mr. Beverley Nichols has given us a clever satirical picture of the wickedness that lurks in Mayfair! An amazingly original entertainment, teeming with epigrammatical brilliancy’.<sup>11</sup> Despite this acclaim, Beverley Nichols now exists only as an occasional footnote in academic literary criticism.<sup>12</sup>

This essay examines the novel *Crazy Pavements*, its place in the literature of the ‘Bright Young People’ and within the literary hierarchies of the twentieth century. *Crazy Pavements*, described in 1981 as a ‘middle-brow vulgarization of Aldous Huxley’s *Antic Hay* and Carl Van Vechten’s *The Blind Bow-Boy*’, is indeed not remotely avant-garde and has therefore had no place in the dominant critical narrative of the 1920s which privileges modernism.<sup>13</sup> *Crazy Pavements* can instead be read as a case-study in the modes of writing and publishing that condemned a work to the derogatory category ‘middlebrow’. This label, coined in the 1920s, was used by critics such as Q. D. Leavis for those ‘middling’ texts, stuck between the honest lowbrow and the authentically experimental highbrow, that they regarded as conservative in form, aiming for artistic merit and moral complexity but really just easy, leisure reading.<sup>14</sup> Over recent years there has been a surge in scholarly interest in middlebrow culture; some of the most important work has been by feminist scholars examining texts labelled middlebrow for their femininity or domesticity, and male writers have received less attention.<sup>15</sup> This essay therefore seeks to recover and analyse Nichols’ place in both the literature of the 1920s and the critical landscape of middlebrow culture.

Nichols was part of a network of literary influence and exchange that informed works now considered canonical. *Crazy Pavements* has many similarities with Evelyn Waugh’s *Vile Bodies*, published three years later in 1930, yet Waugh’s novel is firmly established in literary history as the landmark satirical book about the ‘Bright Young People’, while *Crazy Pavements* is almost entirely forgotten. It could be argued that this is simply because *Vile Bodies* is a better novel, but I will argue that this neglect is equally due to the pleasurable readability of *Crazy Pavements* and to Nichols’ later status as a prolific popular journalist. The changing critical landscape of the twentieth century that valued modernist

experimentation above other, more accessible forms of writing also increasingly denigrated the commercially-minded professional writer. Nichols, I will argue, effectively destroyed his own critical reputation through becoming someone who could and would write almost anything for money. He is now known, if remembered at all, as columnist for *Woman's Own*, a writer of mystery novels, gardening and children's books and as a 'professional cat-lover'.<sup>16</sup> It is a far cry from the highly-praised and promising novelist of the 1920s. As Craig Brown observed in a review of the 1991 biography of Nichols, his 'fall from grace into a mire of giggles must count as one of the deepest plunges in the annals of English Literature'.<sup>17</sup> This precipitant 'fall from grace' and subsequent obscurity tell us a great deal about systems of literary value in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Crazy Pavements* enters the sophisticated streets of Mayfair through a figure familiar to readers of popular newspapers and magazines in the 1920s: the 'modern "Gossip" writer'.<sup>18</sup> Brian Elme, a young, very good-looking, and rather impoverished columnist, makes up stories about whichever peeress is safely out of the country, and unlikely to hear about the lies he has written. One day he makes the mistake of writing about Lady Julia Cresey, who, alas, is not abroad, and demands an apology for the lies published about her. The two meet: 'she, bored, entirely self-confident, a little aggressive – he, humble, frightened, yet inclined to worship' (29). Lady Julia finds Brian's innocence amusing, and decides that he 'should be her refuge against *ennui* for the next few months' (82). Through Lady Julia, Brian is introduced to the decadent Lord William Motley and Maurice Cheyne, who consciously plan to corrupt him.

"[...] because he is so palpably honest, one longs to see his first descent. Because he is so palpably virtuous, one longs for him to have affairs."

“This is rather *vieux jeu*, isn’t it?” said Maurice spitefully. “To show the innocent young man the wickedness of London life?”

“Of course it is an old game. In other words, it has stood the test of time, as being eternally amusing. I intend to play it.” (73)

This is also an old story, familiar from Restoration comedies and eighteenth-century literature, but the novel’s key antecedent is Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).<sup>19</sup> Masks and distortion form a leitmotif, through plastic surgery, disguised sexuality, ‘fancy dress’ and literal masks. Nichols introduces these themes through the scene of Brian’s first evening out with these Society characters. At dinner Lord Motley tells with gruesome relish the story of Lady Anne Hardcastle, a woman with a ‘strange, tight look about the eyes, and a perpetual pout’ (54). Her ‘butchered’ mouth, he happily recounts, appears to be permanently whistling. Next, at the theatre, Brian notices that many of the women ‘appeared to desire to be mistaken for young men, whereas many of the young men had a positively maternal look on their smooth features’ (60). There are hints that Maurice is homosexual, as Julia remarks that he and an actor ‘left Eton under the same cloud’ (61). Brian pricks up his ears, but Maurice quickly changes the subject. This is all unsettlingly strange and new to Brian, who stands in this story for wholesome, traditional values: in this other world women’s faces are altered and distorted, genders are ambiguous and sexuality is questionable.

The evening ends in the ‘Gaga Club’, almost certainly based on one of Nichols’ regular haunts, the Café Royal in London.<sup>20</sup> Nichols offers an accessible satirical portrait of the Bright Young People through Lord Motley wearily surveying the scene:

The jazz band blared and screamed, the air was thick with smoke, the faces of the women were universally contorted. He had a feeling that he was witnessing a ridiculous parade of the wooden soldiers, in which the music had run to riot and the performers were all in thrall to the discipline of *ennui*. How unpleasant it all was! And yet one came here. One came because one didn't wish to think. (71)

In this world that Brian immediately labels 'mad' (58) and Waugh likened to being 'through the Looking-Glass', *ennui* has become, paradoxically, a discipline.<sup>21</sup> There is a sense that the Society set are all trapped, like hamsters on a wheel, in a perpetual cycle of cocktails, dinners, parties and hangovers. (Evelyn Waugh famously conveys the same impression in his description of the endless parties in *Vile Bodies*.<sup>22</sup>) Lord Motley, however, has an outlet for his thoughts: he makes clay masks. They are his 'criticism of life', 'generalizations of types that are running about London to-day' (90). Those on display in his home are disturbing enough, but within a locked room Lord Motley has *secret* masks, grotesque caricatures of his 'friends'. The masks banish Lord Motley's *ennui*, and fill him with 'trembling delight':

"It's true. It's all *true*. That's the terribly amusing part of it. This *is* Lady Thane. This *is* Maurice. This *is* –" and he named a dozen people, pointing a finger at them with trembling delight.

Brian shuddered. He could think of nothing to say.

"You'll see. *You'll* see. One day you'll find them out. You won't see their masks any more. You'll see their faces. Their beastly faces and their abominable souls." (92)

In this world of artifice and illusion, Lord Motley's secret masks ironically express the truth about people. Locked in a room, these masks (like the picture of Dorian Gray) reveal the true faces, beneath the faces worn in public.

It is easy to see why Robert Murray Davis, writing in the *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter*, calls *Crazy Pavements* a 'middle-brow vulgarization' of Aldous Huxley and Carl Van Vechten's 1923 novels.<sup>23</sup> The subject matter and satirical mode have similarities, but the style is markedly more accessible, without, for example, Huxley's challenging display of esoteric language. (*Antic Hay* is renowned for its vocabulary: he uses the adjective 'imberb', for example, to describe a character as beardless.<sup>24</sup>) In common with Van Vechten, Nichols peppers his novel with the names of critics, novelists and painters, but whereas *The Blind Bow-Boy* offers a glittering display of references to test even the most highly cultured reader, Nichols' references are carefully chosen to be aspirational, but within reach of the 'ordinary' reader.<sup>25</sup> This marks the novel, in the hierarchy of brows, as firmly middlebrow. Nicola Humble observes:

Immediately responsive to shifts in public tastes, almost paranoically aware of the latest trends – both popular and intellectual – the middlebrow was able to continually reinvent itself, incorporating highbrow experimentation, language, and attitudes almost as soon as they were formulated, and combining them with a mass accessibility and pleasurable appeal'.<sup>26</sup>

*Crazy Pavements* might be regarded as the first accessibly funny novel about the Bright Young People; *Antic Hay* (1923), while very witty, constantly has the reader reaching for the dictionary, and Michael Arlen's highly popular *The Green Hat* (1925) is filled with quasi-philosophical musings and treats its subject with deep seriousness. Nichols' cheerful and explicit appropriation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* also signals his easy familiarity with



highbrow literature. This is a typically middlebrow choice in that Wilde's controversial novel would be well-known, if not frequently read by Nichols' mass readership, in contrast to Huxley's unfamiliar, esoteric references.<sup>27</sup>

The appropriation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* also signals one of the distinctive and unusual elements of *Crazy Pavements*: the homosexual sub-text. Brian shares a flat with Walter, an ex-naval officer, who has 'an almost absurd hero-worship for Brian' (20). Brian, the narrator is at pains to stress, has 'not only for Walter, but for everyone else [...] a quite exceptional charm' (21). He is 'strong, slim, arduous' (11), but as is characteristic of his wholesomeness, entirely unaware of his own attractiveness. Nichols paints a cosy picture of Brian and Walter at home together:

Walter smoking his pipe, Brian trying to play Debussy on a piano designed only for the simpler marches of Sousa, while the gas-fire filled the room with fumes so potent that less healthy lungs would soon have shown signs of asphyxiation. (21)

The key word here is 'healthy', as Nichols stresses the sexless nature of their relationship. In contrast to the hyperbole of the Bright Young People, to whom everything is either 'divine' or 'agony' (57), Brian and Walter talk in a kind of 'Boy's Own' language: "Hullo! B." "Hullo!" "What are you looking so mouldy about?" (43). However, despite this hearty chumminess, there is a sense that this is a *very* important friendship indeed, as Walter becomes increasingly jealous and distressed by Brian's growing devotion to Julia. Discussing the novel in 1982 Nichols confessed that it was really a homosexual story altered for general consumption: 'Today I could write it as it actually was, but, in those days it was out of the question. Of course Brian and Walter were lovers, and Lady Julia was based on one of those

predatory young queens who collect conquests like scalp-hunters collect scalps.’<sup>28</sup> In an excellent introduction to a new edition of *Crazy Pavements*, David Deutsch argues that ‘Nichols expands British literary conventions considerably here by depicting two healthy, relatively lower-middle-class men in a nurturing romantic relationship’.<sup>29</sup> It seems likely, however, that the homoeroticism of Brian and Walter’s relationship would have passed the great majority of readers by, as Nichols intended.

There are thus two love stories running in parallel in this novel: the love between Walter and Brian, disguised by the author, and the love between Julia and Brian, which Julia tries to hide. Julia is the archetypal 1920s sophisticate: upper-class, wealthy, beautiful, dissipated and hopelessly bored. This figure has its literary roots in Michael Arlen’s ground-breaking *The Green Hat* (1924) and his character Iris Storm, and in Aldous Huxley’s *Antic Hay* character, Myra Viveash. But whereas Iris’s sophistication is clothed in glamour and mystery, and Mrs Viveash’s ‘expiring’ manner is sympathetically explained by the death of her lover in World War I, Julia is a figure to be coolly dissected and satirized. Julia regards Brian as her refuge against ennui, nothing more: ‘he was quite the newest and freshest thing which had been washed up in to the shore of Mayfair for a considerable period. One might play terribly amusing games with him’ (82). Poor Brian, who immediately falls passionately in love with Julia, is merely flotsam. However, the twist in the satirical tale is that Julia, to her own astonishment, in turn falls in love with Brian.

The *Bookman Advertiser* described *Crazy Pavements* as ‘a vicious attack against decadent English nobility but it carries as a super-structure, rather than an underlying motif, a love story that is really unusual.’<sup>30</sup> When Julia falls in love with Brian it is the first pure and unselfconscious emotion she has ever experienced. What makes this love story unusual and

poignant is Julia's unsentimental knowledge that it will pass, and she will be as hard, selfish and bored as she ever was. She tells no-one about this love – this would be unthinkable self-exposure – and instead writes impassioned letters, ostensibly to Brian, but really to herself. It is clear that love is impossible for Julia because it is unsophisticated:

I am ashamed, and yet proud, of every word I write. I am ashamed because it is so ridiculously 'ordinary,' and I hate to believe that I'm an 'ordinary' creature. I hate (or rather, the traditional part of me hates) to believe that I can fall in love in the same way that people love in penny novelettes and popular songs. (176)

This is also about class and the fear of losing social status. To love, in Julia's eyes, is to behave 'like a housemaid' (192). Nichols is satirising part of the *raison d'être* of the Bright Young People – that they must be special, their codes of behaviour entirely separate from the previous generation and from the masses of 'ordinary' people.

The strength of the need to be heartless and sophisticated (and to be seen to be heartless and sophisticated) is such that Lady Anne Hardcastle is able to blackmail Julia with the letters. Julia pretends not to care if her friends see the letters, but Anne knows better. The leitmotif of the mask returns again as Anne explains that this is the only thing anyone like Julia would care about:

Anybody who's terrified of people finding out that one has a heart. Anybody who's posed and posed as bitter and hard and unsentimental [...] you've got to continue in this attitude because any other attitude would be ridiculous, and because the humiliation of becoming a real person in front of your rotten friends would be more than you could bear... (243)

This question of being 'real' and the idea of the 'pose' recur through the novel. Julia, Lord Motley and Maurice are not 'real'; their distorted faces and emotions have no authenticity. In contrast Brian, full of passionate love for Julia, experiences authentic emotions and shows his 'real' face. The novel ends with Julia throwing 'off the mask' (272) and telling Brian 'You're merely one of hundreds of young men who occasionally amuse us' (275). Cast out from the society set, the spell is broken for Brian, and he leaves Mayfair for a symbolic journey to the other side of London. In Blackfriars he joins the working classes celebrating the anniversary of the ending of the Great War, though it is notable that Brian, in his preoccupation, has forgotten the date. 'Of course. August 4<sup>th</sup>. The war. The *great* war.' The italics are ironic, indicating Nichols's increasingly pacifist views. In the vulgar, noisy crowd, Brian finds 'a sort of peace' (283). These people haven't the time to worry about the kind of things he has been worrying about; they have honest, authentic worries about affording the rent. Indeed, Nichols's novel, written in the year of the general strike, reminds us that the boredom and ennui depicted in so many of the novels about the 1920s should be recognized as restricted to a small leisured class, rather than as characteristic of a generation. After a few drinks in the bars of Blackfriars, Brian is tearful with nationalism and singing aloud: 'This was England. This would go on, triumphant, coarse, obscene, vital, long after Lord William, Maurice, Julia and the rest of them had retired to their futile tombs.' (285) As David Deutsch observes, Brian exults in the British middle and working classes he believes will keep Britain and the Empire strong.<sup>31</sup> Then, happily, Brian stumbles in the pub and finds himself sitting on Walter's knee. Reunited, they hold hands: "'Don't go.'" "Course I won't." "I want you – awfully." "Right-o." (286). He has returned to an authentic, homosexual love, albeit clothed in the euphemistic language of the 'Boy's Own' magazine.

Ultimately, this satirical novel is a morality tale that extols the virtue of authentic emotion, as indeed, is Waugh's *Vile Bodies*. However, if Waugh's novel extols the authentic, it is only by its utter absence. Only his gossip columnist Adam can even imagine the idea of the authentic, and Waugh offers no escape from the degraded and fallen world for him. In contrast, for Brian there is another world outside 'society' – an authentic other London, made up of the working and middle classes (including, vitally, Walter). In *Crazy Pavements*, 'with Mrs. Pleat, and eggs and bacon, and inferior coffee, he returned to the world of normal human beings, the world of people who read the *Daily Mail*, and think twice before they spend ten shillings, and follow with real interest the private life of Gloria Swanson' (226).<sup>32</sup> These classes are not troubled by *ennui*. In returning Brian to Walter, as David Deutsch notes, Nichols 'provides a happy alternative to upper-class excesses [and] cross-class inequalities'.<sup>32</sup>

While Waugh's novel is more pessimistic than *Crazy Pavements*, the similarities between the two novels abound, in both content and form. (They are far greater than the similarities between *Crazy Pavements* and *Antic Hay* or *The Blind Bow-Boy*.) The protagonists, Brian and Adam, are both naive young men, similarly orphaned, who enter the world of the Bright Young People. Both become gossip columnists, making up wildly preposterous tales of imaginary peers. In both novels we are given excerpts from the gossip columns, their content serving to continue the satire: see Mr Chatterbox's 'swan-song' of mad lies in *Vile Bodies*, for example,<sup>33</sup> and Brian's innocent description of the arrival of aristocratic babies: '*Amazing, isn't it, how cute the modern child is becoming?*' (23). Adam also finds himself automatically writing copy in his head, just as Brian does: 'automatically Adam began making up a paragraph about it',<sup>34</sup> 'Ridiculously, in the maze of introductions, paragraphs flitted through Brian's head' (50). The names of Brian's imaginary peers would be equally at home in *Vile Bodies*: Lady Turf-Moore, Lord Agincourt, Lady Gallstone (235-6). It is also worth noting

that Adam has already written his memoirs when *Vile Bodies* begins, while Beverley Nichols was well-known for having written his first autobiography at the age of twenty-five.

In both novels there is also a narrator making satirical interjections; in *Crazy Pavements* he is a frequent presence, guiding the reader and commentating upon the story. In *Vile Bodies* the interjections are infrequent and always in parenthesis: '(Oh, Bright Young People!)'.<sup>35</sup>

However, while both novels use the intrusive narrator for satirical purposes, the tone differs greatly. Nichols' narrator is playful, gossipy and confiding; he guides the reader through the strange world of the Bright Young People, while subtly flattering the reader with the understanding that they are as sophisticated as the writer. Waugh's narrator occasionally guides the reader but the effect is to distance the reader from a world s/he is not expected to understand.<sup>36</sup>

The intrusive narrator of *Crazy Pavements* is both a reason why the novel was regarded as 'middlebrow' and a mark of its modernity. As well as guiding the reader through the world of the Mayfair set, the narrator similarly guides the reader through the literary form of the novel, directly addressing him/her on points of technique. Nichols begins chapter 20:

The observant reader, who has followed Brian's passage through London, ticking off the various vices, plain and coloured, with which he has come in contact, will doubtless be puzzled by a curious omission. Where are the drug fiends? (217)

The narrator flatters the 'observant reader' that they know what to expect from this decadent Mayfair world, as indeed the contemporary reader would, if they had read the newspapers and other 'roaring twenties' novels. On page 217, Nichols also acknowledges the material

fact that reader is clearly coming to the end of this 287 page novel, with not a drug fiend in sight! He will now rectify the omission, but proceeds with sophisticated calmness:

There is nothing particularly exciting about, say, the taking of cocaine as a mere physiological phenomenon. Its action on the mind is, after a regrettably short period, less stimulating than a dramatic criticism by Mr. George J. Nathan. (217)

The narrator then draws attention to his use of foreshadowing, though, of course, he flatters his reader that he does not need to:

Take a young man like Brian, to whom the very idea of cocaine suggests the Evil One. Take Lord William Motley, the subtle reference to whose little gold box, a few chapters back, will not have passed unnoticed. Bring these two characters together, produce the gold box, describe the deed. What happens? (217)

The narrator thus manages to construct the reader as sophisticated, while simultaneously guiding them around the narrative curves; a highly middlebrow manoeuvre. Nichols' accessible, confiding style in *Crazy Pavements* is very modern, though not, of course, in the modernist sense. It has instead much in common with his journalistic writing, and in this Nichols is writing in a new style of journalism gaining popularity in the 1920s. Michael Joseph's *Journalism for Profit* (1924) advised the writer on how to treat the 'Great British Public': 'Amuse it. Cheer it up. Chat to it. Bully it a little. Tickle its funny bone. Giggle with it. Confide in it. Give it, now and again, a good cry. It loves that. But don't for your success's sake, come the superior highbrow over it.'<sup>37</sup> Nichols desperately wanted to be 'taken

seriously' but he would never 'come the superior highbrow'; the impression given by his biography is that he would always try and communicate with as large an audience as possible. Q. D. Leavis was appalled by what she saw as the 'same anxiety to conciliate and flatter "the man in the street"' in modern fiction as in journalism. The close relationship between journalism and fiction was also to be deplored for the effect on style:

The thinness and surface liveliness of the writing, the crude, elementary prose, carefully constructed in phrases and simple sentences so as to read with the maximum of ease, of modern popular novelists at all levels approximates as nearly as possible to the style of the journalist, and this is not surprising when we recollect how close is the connection between popular novel and magazine story and between magazine and newspaper. In fact, the line between journalist and novelist can no longer be drawn.<sup>38</sup>

Nichols was just one of many writers in the period who prolifically wrote novels, stories and journalism, with no strict division in style or content between these modes. (Two of Nichols' books in the 1920s were collections of essays previously published in newspapers and magazines, for example, and he wrote a series of short stories for the *Daily News* in 1922.<sup>39</sup>) Key to the perceived breakdown in standards of style introduced by this connection with journalism is the *ease* of reading. J. B. Priestley, criticized for the apparent simplicity of his writing, argued that the new generation of critics in the 1930s, such as Q. D. Leavis, 'grew up in revolt against the Mass Communication antics of their age. [...] Writing that was hard to understand was like a password to their secret society. A good writer to them was one who made his readers toil and sweat'.<sup>40</sup> Nichols, in contrast, wished to entertain.

This is not to argue, as Q. D. Leavis might, that *Crazy Pavements* is a simplistic novel. Nichols' attitude to his subject is complex. On the one hand *Crazy Pavements* is a biting



satire and a ‘vicious attack against decadent English nobility’<sup>41</sup>. Sophistication, with its inability to express emotion, and its dedication to the ‘pose’ is constantly mocked. Yet Nichols elsewhere described himself as just one of these posers, and vigorously defended the pose. He wrote in a profile of himself in 1927, the same year as *Crazy Pavements* was published, ‘Pose – pose – it all comes down to that. I am posing all my life. So are you. Why not admit it?’<sup>42</sup> Satire would seem the natural mode for his generation: ‘the key to my outlook, and to that of so many of my contemporaries, is that I have *seen through things*, and have been honest enough to admit it.’ Yet, in *Crazy Pavements*, the contradiction is that the very thing he ‘sees through’ is sophistication itself. This is perhaps explained by the autobiographical nature of the novel. Nichols had been in the position of Brian: in 1921, aged 22, Nichols got his first newspaper staff job as a reporter on the *Sunday Dispatch*. It was a world of extreme snobbery: ‘we dealt only in lords and ladies’, and reported the exploits of ‘an astonishing array of obscure countesses, viscountesses, and if the worst came to the worst, wives of baronets’.<sup>43</sup> In *Crazy Pavements* the narrator remarks:

To you, perhaps, the ‘Gossip’ writer is something mean, and slightly comic. To me, he is one of the world’s great tragedies. I am sick at heart for these lingerers in the outer courts of Society, with their brave gentility, their ears pricked for some wearisome trifle about some wearisome woman. [...] Why, then, did Brian adopt this ignoble profession? For the same reason as any other mental or physical prostitute. He had to live. (p. 11)

The narrative voice is satirical and unflinching - the gossip writer is a ‘prostitute’ – but the attitude is not detached or blasé. Instead Nichols, creating a character in a position similar to that which he experienced himself, is sympathetic, even sentimental. Brian, unlike the aristocratic characters, is to be regarded with moral sympathy.

There are frequent intrusions of sentimentality to the satire of *Crazy Pavements* – the scene above, where Nichols depicts the working-classes as ‘triumphant, coarse, obscene, vital’, might be seen as another example. This was typical of Nichols, and throughout his career he would be criticized for it. Bryan Cannon, Nichols’ biographer, saw in *Crazy Pavements* a problem that Nichols ‘never satisfactorily resolved: his apparent cynicism about the modern world could change almost in mid-sentence into a passionate plea for moral values, justice for the underprivileged, or whatever happened to touch him deeply at the time’.<sup>44</sup> Nichols’ friend Noel Coward described the problem in more colourful, but rather less sympathetic terms: Nichols was ‘pink and summer puddingish and liable to be swayed by sawney sentimental values’<sup>45</sup> However, Coward also suggested that Nichols was not alone in merely posing as a cynic at this time. In a 1957 letter written in response to Nichols’ request for some thoughts for the memoir of the 1920s he was writing, Coward mused: ‘Were we happy in the Twenties? On the whole I think most of us were but we tried to hide it by being as blasé, world-weary and “jagged with sophistication” as we possibly could. Naturally we had a lot of fun in the process.’<sup>46</sup> Coward is quoting from his 1930 play *Private Lives*, in which Amanda says: ‘I suffered a good deal, and had my heart broken. But it wasn’t an innocent girlish heart. It was jagged with sophistication. I’ve always been sophisticated, far too knowing. That caused many of my rows with Elyot. I irritated him because he knew I could see through him.’<sup>47</sup>

In *Crazy Pavements*, described by one reviewer as ‘jagged with nuggets of golden wit and terribly perverting satire’, I would argue Nichols is enacting the same tension between sophistication and sentiment that exists in Coward’s plays from the period.<sup>48</sup> As Faye Hammill observes, ‘although sophistication is often understood in terms of a rejection of the

sentimental, in Coward [and others] sophistication proves unexpectedly compatible with sentiment and romance.’ Hammill argues that in a play such as *Private Lives* it is perhaps the self-consciousness about the conventions of romance that allows there to be both a ‘jagged’ element and an ‘intensely romantic mood’.<sup>49</sup> Something similar is at work in Nichols’ depiction of Julia’s love for Brian: Julia is always self-conscious about the conventions of love and tries to retain her pose of sophistication, but this very attempt makes her emotions appear more poignant and more sincere.

The love story, sentimentality and accessible style helped to make what is on the face of it a rather shocking story, acceptable to a popular audience. As *The Saturday Review of Literature* put it, ‘In the course of these pages we find ourselves in company with (among other types) nymphomaniacs, homosexualists, sadists, and drug-addicts [...] but the author is so decent about it all that we have no quarrel with him or with his material.’<sup>50</sup> Through the character of Brian the narrative asserts a conventional moral position: the taking of cocaine, for example, is described as ‘though a corpse were being generated into activity by the application of electricity’, and sickens Brian (221). A party where the guests dress and behave as children is described as ‘a typical social phenomenon of the post-war period’ and regarded with increasing disgust by Brian (152).<sup>51</sup> The portrayal of homosexuality, however, is less conventional. As well as the hidden homosexual relationship of Brian and Walter, there is the open depiction of a young, gay man in Maurice Cheyne. In an emotionally loaded scene, Maurice accuses Brian of ‘hypocrisy’ and tearfully protests,

“I’m as natural as you are. [...] Did I make myself? Did I go to God and say, please make me a freak? Please take away from me all power to love anybody? Please put

me into this world with desires that I mustn't satisfy and longings for something I can never get? Did I? Did I?" (231-2)

This is one of Nichols' 'passionate pleas for moral values' that went against popular beliefs, but it is not mentioned in the reviews, which perhaps saw the character of Maurice as simply part of the depiction of modern decadence. Nichols himself offers this interpretation to the reader, describing Maurice as 'suffering from a malady which had twisted him in his very cradle, a malady, moreover, which the entire resources of modern Society seemed designed to intensify' (233). This silence on the part of the reviewers becomes more significant when put into context: Adrian Bingham has shown that the press in the 1920s habitually 'claimed the role of moral guardian, seeking to protect readers from "inappropriate" or "indecent" forms of cultural expression',<sup>52</sup> and only a year later, in 1928, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* would be withdrawn and prosecuted for obscenity. The explanation seems to be that reviewers simply did not believe in the world Nichols depicted. The *Daily Mail* noted the 'wickedness [...] which the reader will do well not to take too seriously'.<sup>53</sup> Cannon recounts that in later life Nichols was still amused by these critics, calling them 'poor, blinkered darlings!'<sup>54</sup>

Yet *Crazy Pavements* fictionalized real people and events (many of the same incidents are recounted in Nichols' memoir *All I Could Never Be* (1949)), and legal action was threatened. Nichols wrote:

It was, quite frankly, a satire on the little set that danced attendance on Lord Lathom, with whom I had had a rather dingy quarrel. Before the novel appeared, there was a great hullabaloo, and dreadful things were threatened by his lawyers. But when it was

published and became a best-seller, Ned Lathom expressed himself delighted, and once again we were friends.<sup>55</sup>

The details of the quarrel are unknown (Nichols later said that Lord William in the novel was partly based on Ned Lathom, but mostly on another socialite he detested),<sup>56</sup> but in Nichols' account, no lasting harm was done – though later in 1927 he did take the precaution of taking out an 'author's libel policy'.<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, in Nichols' account all was forgiven once the novel became a bestseller, suggesting that commercial success could triumph over libel; people *wanted* to be in a successful book. He wrote: 'It was one of the many occasions on which I have learned that nothing succeeds like success.'<sup>58</sup> (A reviewer of his Oxford novel *Patchwork* (1921) remarked on the same phenomenon: 'If any objection were to be raised to *Patchwork*, it would come from those whose careers and characters have been libellously left out'.)<sup>59</sup> Nichols had become well-known for exploiting his life in his writing. In Dorothy L. Sayers' 1930 novel *The Documents in the Case* it is said of an aspiring young writer:

Indeed, it is obvious that, even in writing to his fiancée, he was writing for effect half the time and quite possibly with an eye to future publication. With young men like Beverley Nichols and Robert Graves prattling in public about their domestic affairs, we need hardly expect to find any decent reticence among the smart novelists of today.<sup>60</sup>

The *Nation and Athenaeum* did not regard *Crazy Pavements* as a novel, and its praise was therefore very faint indeed: 'To such volumes the tests which one applies to works of imagination are quite unsuitable; one requires a less rare and more everyday kind of excellence. "Crazy Pavements" possesses in a high degree this kind of excellence.' Implicit

in this review is the judgment that non-fiction narratives – closely related to journalism - are of much lesser value than ‘true’ fiction.<sup>61</sup>

In *Crazy Pavements*, and in later years, Nichols portrayed himself as a ‘Brian’ on the outside of the party set, looking in. Nichols claimed that rather than being ‘leading spirits of the Bright Young People’, he, Waugh and Noel Coward ‘were in fact their most energetic critics, as we were later to prove – Noel in the theatre, Waugh in *Vile Bodies*, and myself in *Crazy Pavements*.’<sup>62</sup> However, while Nichols had been in the position of Brian, by the time he wrote *Crazy Pavements* he was fully embedded within the society he was satirizing. Nichols published a characteristically witty and provocative autobiography in 1926 entitled *Twenty-Five* and his biographer, Bryan Cannon comments, ‘Beverley had been a popular figure on the social scene before *Twenty-Five* but after its success no London hostess of any consequence could ignore him’.<sup>63</sup> Certainly Nichols, along with Coward and Waugh, was not a *leisured* member of the party set. A look at the letters and diaries of any of the three from the 1920s reveals a punishing schedule of socialising and writing. Nichols, Waugh and Coward, though their backgrounds differed, were all social climbers who needed to earn a living. In this position, within but not from the Society set, they were ideally placed as satirists. It is notable that class position is a significant element in *Crazy Pavements*, with the Society set juxtaposed against the working and middle classes.

Waugh, entering the same Society world a few years after Nichols, definitely knew Nichols and was aware of his success with a satire on the Bright Young Things. After the poor sales of *Decline and Fall* (1928), Waugh described his early work on *Vile Bodies* as ‘a welter of sex and snobbery written simply in the hope of selling some copies’.<sup>64</sup> It is difficult to believe that *Crazy Pavements* was not an influence. Donat Gallagher notes that ‘When *Vile Bodies*

came out in 1930 it made Waugh a celebrity, partly because it popularized the doings and sayings of the ultra-glamorous Bright Young Things, but largely because it included recognizable portraits of prominent people'.<sup>65</sup> In this Waugh was following a well-established route to book sales begun by Michael Arlen with *The Green Hat* in 1924 and consolidated by Nichols in 1927.<sup>66</sup>

Connon writes that Nichols did not know how to react to the similarities between *Vile Bodies* and *Crazy Pavements*: 'Coincidence may have played its part, but he remained suspicious that Waugh had used his book as a crib and never quite gave him the benefit of the doubt.'<sup>67</sup> Despite this, Nichols never gave voice to his suspicions in print, and bracketed himself, Coward and Waugh together as critics of the Bright Young Things, as quoted above. Waugh, in contrast, tried to distance himself from Nichols from the first. In 1930 he was commissioned by Lord Northcliffe's mass market *Daily Mail* to write a weekly article. In June that year he wrote in his diary that 'Cecil Beaton told me that [Gilbert] Frankau has written an attack on us both coupling our names with Godfrey Winn and Beverley Nichols. That comes of writing in the *Mail*.'<sup>68</sup> However, Waugh and Nichols continued to move in the same circles, and to write for the same papers. When Waugh wrote a piece for *Life* on his World War II posting with the (hitherto secret) Commandos, Nichols wrote mockingly in the *Evening Standard*, 'Evelyn at this moment is a hard-bitten, sun-scorched Commando, with the dust of the desert in his eyes, and a rifle in his hand [...] The ex-dilettante, writing exquisite froth between cocktails, has proved one of the toughest of the lot'.<sup>69</sup> Waugh was not amused; he wrote to his father, '[Nichols'] inaccurate gossip about me caused pleasure on the lower deck but nowhere else'.<sup>70</sup>

D. J. Taylor argues that *Vile Bodies*' 'considerable debt' to *Crazy Pavements* meant that Waugh and Nichols' relationship was 'chronically strained'.<sup>71</sup> It is not clear that Waugh's disparagement of Nichols was motivated by consciousness of a debt, but the pen portrait in his war-time diary displays Waugh's characteristic talent for both wit and cruelty: 'A nervous wreck named Beverley Nichols has arrived. Not a man of strong understanding. A mercenary, hypochondriacal, flibbertigibbet who doesn't take in one of six words address to him – but civil to the old ladies.'<sup>72</sup> Waugh appeared to need to distance himself from Nichols to the extent that he describes Nichols as if he had never met him before, when they had in fact known each other for at least 15 years – and only four days earlier he had written to his wife Laura: 'Mr B. Nichols is behaving very well. Leaving me to work when I want to and telling me about "Ivor" Novello & "Willy" Maugham and "Noel" Coward when I want relaxation'.<sup>73</sup>

A later letter to his daughters again shows that Waugh was not averse to socialising with those he despised, and makes clearer the terms of his disparagement of Nichols. Waugh wrote from a boat to Bermuda:

There is a poor old journalist called Beverley Nichols on board who cares more about his personal appearance than the vainest of ladies and he has come on to this ship purely in the hope of sun-bathing and acquiring a becoming sun-tan. It has been far too stormy to venture out on deck and he is in tears of disappointment [...]

I have learned to play Scrabble. We will get a set & play at Easter. I play with poor weeping Mr Beverley Nichols.<sup>74</sup>

Nichols, precocious writer of acclaimed and best-selling novels, sell-out revues and plays, is simply a 'poor old journalist'. Nichols himself argued that the problem was one of



categorisation and context. He wrote of Somerset Maugham's uncertain literary status in the interwar period:

Critics are simple people; they like things to be docketed and in their proper place.

The proper place for first-class prose is in the literary weeklies and the limited editions; it worries them when they encounter it in the ten-cent magazines. All their standards are upset; it is like meeting Virginia Woolf in the fish queue. A writer who wishes to be 'taken seriously' will be well advised, as long as he can afford it, to avoid publishing his work in any magazine with a national circulation. It is almost fatal to prestige.<sup>75</sup>

However, as I have demonstrated, the problem for Nichols was not simply where he published; it was the prose itself. While some reviewers did think his prose was 'first-class' - the *Bookman* thought *Crazy Pavements* 'teeming with epigrammatical brilliancy' - others did not. The problem was that he wrote to entertain, and with a journalistic ease that as the century progressed was increasingly disparaged in comparison to 'difficult' avant-garde literature. Nichols, unfortunately, desperately wanted success in all forms: he wanted to make money, be famous *and* to be taken seriously by the critics. His work rate was extraordinary, and his entire life was a sometimes destructive mission to produce the 'next big thing'. This ambition itself, ironically, also damaged his claim to a 'literary' reputation. As early as 1921, a reviewer in *The Spectator* questioned his motivation:

Mr. Beverley Nichols has a fatal defect. It is one of motive. He does not write accounts of his life in great institutions because he really desires the truth to be known about them. [...] He wishes to amuse both himself and his reader. He wishes to gain reputation. He wishes to "have written books".<sup>76</sup>

The question, ultimately, is about authenticity. The *Spectator*'s implication is that the real artist is only interested in truth, not in entertaining, or in money or fame. If Nichols' motivations were considered unworthy in 1921, worse was to come. In 1930 he realized he had become heavily overdrawn, and was forced to give up his London house. Cannon notes that this marked the point when Nichols resolved to write as much as possible to earn money, even if that meant work he would not otherwise choose to do.<sup>77</sup> Nichols defended the desire to make money as a 'laudable and essentially moral ambition'.<sup>78</sup> He needed to mount a defence for many would agree with Q. D. Leavis that the journalist grows 'prosperous at the expense of culture'.<sup>79</sup> By 1938 a critic in the *London Mercury* could describe Nichols as an essayist and journalist who had:

an extraordinary flair for determining the correct moment at which to muscle in on whatever racket popular feeling makes it most profitable to exploit. During the last few years he has been an infallible barometer of public taste in registering successively the thoughts of the unthinking about America, gardening, pacifism, God.<sup>80</sup>

Nichols had far too astute a sense of what was commercially profitable for his own good. His popular journalism also tainted his other work - the novels, plays and revues - by association. As Adrian Bingham suggests 'it was not merely the nature or readership of an author's books and plays that dictated their cultural esteem, but also their wider participation in the commercial world of the mass media. [...] Authors who accepted the popular press's gold inevitably risked a critical backlash.'<sup>81</sup> Similarly damaging to Nichols' literary reputation was his flexibility and success in a wide range of low-status genres of writing associated with

women and domesticity: gardening, children's fiction, homes and interiors. Also damaging was his comic style: Nichols' writing was almost always characterized by playful, charming wit, whatever the genre; he had the exceptionally rare talent of making even gardening laugh-out-loud funny. Comedy is an undervalued mode of writing; to be funny is frequently to be mistaken for being merely frivolous, and the technical skill required is often unappreciated.<sup>82</sup>

If Nichols had died in 1929, would he then have become known as a brilliant satirist of the 1920s? In 1927 *The Saturday Review of Literature* called him 'an instinctive artist; [...] given the added weight of a few more years and a continuously widening horizon, his writing will demand serious consideration'; while in 1930 Ethel Mannin rated his 'genius' above his friend Noel Coward.<sup>83</sup> In 1949 the *Times Literary Supplement* noted that 'Although it was perhaps never exactly fashionable in intellectual circles to admire Mr. Beverley Nichols no one could deny his sensibility. This and his easy, graceful style approximate more nearly to genius than his sterner critics might admit' but regretted that he now 'falls a trifle thin on the more workmanlike world of the 1940s'.<sup>84</sup> An 'easy, graceful style' was not likely to appeal to those critics of the 1930s who valued the writer 'who made his readers toil and sweat'.<sup>85</sup> By the 1950s Nichols was often ridiculed for his weekly articles in *Woman's Own*. Connon reports that Evelyn Waugh once remarked to him condescendingly: "I hear you are reaching more housewives than ever with your little pieces." "Yes," Beverley replied, "my little pieces make thousands of women happy, which is more than most men can say."<sup>86</sup> Nichols knew that his decision to write a column for *Woman's Own* killed any remaining chance of him being 'taken seriously' by the literary establishment, but he remained extremely optimistic - even delusional - about his long-term reputation. In 1956 he wrote in his diary, 'It will be a hundred years before my own work finds its proper level. I have a shrewd idea of what that

level will be. I shall be on the same shelf as Jane Austen, Mrs Gaskell, Hazlitt and Lewis Carroll'.<sup>87</sup>

Nichols' 'level' has been determined throughout the twentieth century by the hierarchy of brows. His chosen genres, writing style, motivation and modes of publication all seem precisely calculated to place his work in the disparaged category 'middlebrow'. Q. D. Leavis called such work the '*faux-bon*' - that which pretends to be good writing, but isn't really.<sup>88</sup> To call a text a middlebrow vulgarization is perhaps therefore a tautology, as the middlebrow is always assumed to be vulgar, because it pretends to be something it is not. It is this pretension that distinguishes it from the honest lowbrow. As the sophisticated character Campaspe muses in *The Blind Bow-Boy*, 'only those are vulgar who make pretensions to be what they are not'.<sup>89</sup> Ironically, Beverley Nichols' writing did *not* have pretensions to be what it was not; perhaps if it had he would have achieved his great desire to be 'taken seriously'.

An analysis of *Crazy Pavements* and Nichols' career thus not only illuminates the network of exchange and influence in the writing of the 'bright young things', but also foregrounds the system of literary values that they operated within, and which informed their later reception. The dismissal of Nichols' novel as middlebrow vulgarization, despite its freshness, wit, unusually sympathetic depictions of gay men and complex attitude to its subject, reveals just how hostile a view was taken of accessibility and prolific popular journalism by many critics from the 1920s onwards. Beverley Nichols, who had such high hopes for his literary reputation, is a writer who deserves further attention in the critical study of the denigrated middlebrow of the twentieth century.

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Ethel Mannin, *Confessions and Impressions*, revised edn (London, 1936), 245.
- <sup>2</sup> Evelyn Waugh, Sunday 21 May 1944, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Michael Davie (London, 1976), 566.
- <sup>3</sup> Bryan Connon, *Beverley Nichols: A Life* (London, 1991), 55.
- <sup>4</sup> For an account of the lives of Zita Jungman and Elizabeth Ponsonby see D. J. Taylor, *Bright Young People: The Rise and Fall of a Generation 1918-1940* (London, 2007).
- <sup>5</sup> Beverley Nichols, *All I Could Never Be* (London, 1949), 40.
- <sup>6</sup> ‘New Novels’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 February 1920, 123.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Saturday Review*, 22 October 1922, 490.
- <sup>8</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, quoted in Connon, 110.
- <sup>9</sup> ‘The New Books’, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 16 July 1927, 981. *Crazy Pavements* went through four impressions in its first year of publication. An advertisement by publisher Jonathan Cape proclaimed ‘First impression Sold Out on the day of publication’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 February 1927. It was reissued by Florin books in 1932 and was on the tenth impression by 1935.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 16 July 1927, 981.
- <sup>11</sup> *Bookman*, quoted in the end matter of the Florin edition of Beverley Nichols, *Crazy Pavements* (London, 1932), n.p.
- <sup>12</sup> An indication of Nichols’ obscurity is that his name is misspelt ‘Nicholls’ in the index of several books on Evelyn Waugh. Nichols does not appear in the standard reference books: Dinah Birch, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford, 2009), Dominic Head, ed., *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, 2006).
- <sup>13</sup> Robert Murray Davis, ‘A Dim Novel About Bright Young People’, *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter* 15 (1981), 4-5, 5.
- <sup>14</sup> For an introduction to middlebrow see Erica Brown and Mary Grover, eds, *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960* (Basingstoke, 2012), 1-21.
- <sup>15</sup> For attention to the masculine middlebrow see Kate Macdonald, ed., *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr Miniver Read* (Basingstoke, 2011).
- <sup>16</sup> Craig Brown, ‘From sweetie-pie to stinkpots’, review of Bryan Connon, *Beverley Nichols: A Life* (London, 1991), in *Times Literary Supplement*, 19 April 1991, 24.
- <sup>17</sup> Craig Brown, ‘From sweetie-pie’, 24.

---

<sup>18</sup> Beverley Nichols, *Crazy Pavements* (London, 1932), 7. Subsequent references will be in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>19</sup> When Beverley Nichols was a teenager he was discovered by his father reading *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In Beverley's account his father was horrified, hit him across the face, called him a 'pretty little bastard', spat on the book and tore it with his teeth. Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 39-40.

<sup>20</sup> See the references to the Café Royal in Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, especially 54-6.

<sup>21</sup> The epigraph to *Vile Bodies* consists of two quotations from *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871) by Lewis Carroll.

<sup>22</sup> '(... Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties, Russian parties, Circus parties, parties where one had to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St John's Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and night clubs, in windmills and swimming-baths, tea parties at school where one ate muffins and meringues and tinned crab, parties at Oxford where one drank brown sherry and smoked Turkish cigarettes, dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Paris - all that succession and repetition of massed humanity. ... Those vile bodies ...)' Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (Harmondsworth, 1976), 123.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Murray Davis, 'A Dim Novel About Bright Young People', *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter* 15 (1981), 4-5, 5.

<sup>24</sup> The novel is cited in 64 entries in the *OED. Oxford English Dictionary*, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com). Accessed 16 May 2014.

<sup>25</sup> See for example Carl Van Vechten, *The Blind Bow-Boy* (New York, 1923), 96: 'plays by Luigi Pirandello, tales by Dopo Kunikida, poems by the Welsh poet, Ab Gwilym, Jésus-la-Caille by Francis Carco, Las Sonatas by Del Valle Inclán, and Aldous Huxley's Mortal Coils...'

<sup>26</sup> Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s-1950s* (Oxford, 2001), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Nichols was keen that in *Crazy Pavements* he would be recognised as a purposeful and intelligent stylist playing with intertexts rather than a lazy plagiarist. He was horrified when his first best-seller *Self* (1922) was taken seriously, rather than as the pastiche of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Mrs Gaskell's *Cranford* he had intended. (Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 110.

<sup>28</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 127.

- 
- <sup>29</sup> David Deutsch, Introduction to Beverley Nichols, *Crazy Pavements* (Kansas City, 2013), viii. This new edition is the first since the 1930s, and Deutsch's introduction the first critical appraisal of the novel since the article in the *Evelyn Waugh Newsletter* in 1981.
- <sup>30</sup> *Bookman Advertiser*, May 1927, xx.
- <sup>31</sup> Deutsch, Introduction to *Crazy Pavements*, ix.
- <sup>32</sup> Deutsch, Introduction to *Crazy Pavements*, viii.
- <sup>33</sup> Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, 104-6.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-1
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. The famous description of the parties also comes in parenthesis, 123.
- <sup>36</sup> For example, 'Perhaps it should be explained'. *Ibid.*, 52.
- <sup>37</sup> Quoted in Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London, 2000), 26.
- <sup>38</sup> Q. D. Leavis, 185.
- <sup>39</sup> *Are They the Same At Home?* (1927) and *The Star Spangled Manner* (1928).
- <sup>40</sup> J. B. Priestley, 'Making Writing Simple', in *Delight* (Ilkley, 2009), 85.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Bookman Advertiser*, May 1927, xx.
- <sup>42</sup> Beverley Nichols, *Are They The Same At Home?* (1927), 261.
- <sup>43</sup> Nichols, *All I Could Never Be*, 29-30.
- <sup>44</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 127.
- <sup>45</sup> Noel Coward, Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> October 1966, *The Noel Coward Diaries*, ed. Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley (London, 1982), 637.
- <sup>46</sup> Letter from Coward to Nichols, 1957, in Cole Lesley, *The Life of Noel Coward* (London, 1976), 124.
- <sup>47</sup> Noel Coward, *Private Lives*, in Coward, *Play Parade: The Collected Plays of Noel Coward*, vol 1 (London, 1934), 465-554, 477.
- <sup>48</sup> Cecil Roberts, 'Bohemia to Mayfair and Back', *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 May 1927, 14.
- <sup>49</sup> Faye Hammill, *Sophistication: A Literary and Cultural History* (Liverpool, 2010), 115.
- <sup>50</sup> *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 16 July 1927, 981.
- <sup>51</sup> The 'children's party' appears to have been enduringly popular with the bright young people: Martin Stannard describes a 'Second Childhood Party' in 1929, two years after *Crazy Pavements* was published. (Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years 1903-1939* (London, 1988), 180.

---

<sup>52</sup> Adrian Bingham, 'Cultural Hierarchies and the Interwar British Press', in Erica Brown and Mary Grover (eds), *Middlebrow Literary Cultures* (Houndmills, 2012), 56.

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Mail*, 22 February 1927, 17.

<sup>54</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 127.

<sup>55</sup> Nichols, *All I Could Never Be*, 84.

<sup>56</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 127. Ned Lathom was Edward Bootle-Wilbraham, fifth Earl of Lathom. Gay, aristocratic, and extremely wealthy, Lathom surrounded himself with talented, gay and good-looking young men, including Nichols, Noel Coward and Ivor Novello.

<sup>57</sup> Nichols, *All I Could Never Be*, 84.

<sup>58</sup> Nichols, *All I Could Never Be*, 84.

<sup>59</sup> Review of Beverley Nichols, *Patchwork* (1921) in the *Morning Post* quoted in Connon, 97.

<sup>60</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Documents in the Case* (1930; repr., 1978), 172. Sayers is presumably referring to Graves's autobiography *Good-bye to All That*, published in 1929.

<sup>61</sup> 'Fiction', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 12 March 1927, 802.

<sup>62</sup> Nichols, *All I Could Never Be*, 40.

<sup>63</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 124. Nichols, *Twenty-Five: Being a Young Man's Candid Recollections of His Elders and Betters* (London, 1926). The book opens with the provocative sentence, 'Twenty-five seems to me the latest age at which anybody should write an autobiography.' After thus sparking indignation or amusement in the reader, Nichols then smoothly explains that this is the time to write about other people. Why 'not write about some of the exciting people he has seen, while they still excite him?' (9) It contains portraits of literary figures such as Michael Arlen, G. K. Chesterton and Somerset Maugham; politicians Winston Churchill and Horatio Bottomley; and describes Nichols' time in Greece with King Constantine and Queen Sophie.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from Evelyn Waugh to Harold Acton, July 1929, quoted in Martin Stannard, *Evelyn Waugh: The Early Years 1903-1939* (London, 1988), 180.

<sup>65</sup> *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Donat Gallagher (London, 1983), 37.

<sup>66</sup> To be fair to Waugh, this network of influences is almost always part of the process of writing and publishing. Reading Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* (1917) spurred Nichols on in his writing of *Prelude* (1920) (Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 54) and *The Loom's* success encouraged Chatto and Windus to accept the novel (Marius Hentea, 'Late Modernist Debuts: Publishing and Professionalizing Young Novelists in 1920s Britain', *Book History* 14 (2011), 167-186, 172).



- 
- <sup>67</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 127.
- <sup>68</sup> Evelyn Waugh, Thursday 19 June 1930, *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Michael Davie (London, 1976), 316.
- <sup>69</sup> ‘Here is the Story of a “Bright Young Man” Who is One of the Toughest of Our Commandos’, *Evening Standard*, 23 November 1941, quoted in Douglas Lane Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh: A Critical Biography* (Oxford, 1998), 189.
- <sup>70</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Arthur Waugh, 5 December 1941, *Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 182.
- <sup>71</sup> D. J. Taylor, *Bright Young People* (London, 2007), 251.
- <sup>72</sup> Evelyn Waugh, Sunday 21 May 1944, *Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, 566.
- <sup>73</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Laura Waugh, 17 May 1944, *Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 211.
- <sup>74</sup> Evelyn Waugh to Margaret and Harriet Waugh, January 1955, *Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 496.
- <sup>75</sup> Nichols, *All I Could Never Be*, 93.
- <sup>76</sup> ‘Fiction: Oxford After the War’, *The Spectator*, 12 November 1921, 22.
- <sup>77</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 148-9.
- <sup>78</sup> Nichols, *All I Could Never Be*, 25.
- <sup>79</sup> Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction*, 96.
- <sup>80</sup> Derek Verschoyle, ‘At the end of the garden path’, *London Mercury*, 38, no. 223 (May 1938), 78-9.
- <sup>81</sup> Bingham, ‘Cultural Hierarchies’, 62-3.
- <sup>82</sup> For analysis of the role of comedy in literary hierarchies, see Erica Brown, *Comedy and the Feminine Middlebrow Novel* (London, 2013), 13-23.
- <sup>83</sup> ‘The New Books’, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 16 July 1927, 981; Mannin, *Confessions and Impressions*, 244.
- <sup>84</sup> ‘Pavement and Garden Path’, review of Beverley Nichols, *All I Could Never Be* (London, 1949), *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 February 1949, 91.
- <sup>85</sup> Priestley, 85.
- <sup>86</sup> Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 230.
- <sup>87</sup> Diary of Beverley Nichols 3 Jan 1956, quoted in Connon, *Beverley Nichols*, 303.
- <sup>88</sup> Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction*, 39.
- <sup>89</sup> Van Vechten, *The Blind Bow-Boy*, 156.